

Testimony of

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Before the

Education Committee

March 15, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee.

I testify today in support of House Bill 6884. This bill takes important steps toward addressing the educator shortage in Connecticut, showing educators that theirs is a respected profession, and ensuring that our classrooms and schools can provide the best possible education for our students.

I testify today in support of House Bill 6884. This bill takes important steps toward addressing the educator shortage in Connecticut, showing educators that theirs is a respected profession, and ensuring that our classrooms and schools can provide the best possible education for our students. I've been teaching for 30 years. Prior to 2020, I was finally feeling like one of those master teachers I admired who seemed to have an endless bag of tricks and made it seem effortless. All that changed overnight. I'm sure it goes without saying how challenging it was to pivot to teaching online in the spring of 2020. I remember feeling so lost. We were given the technology, but not the pedagogy, to continue to educate students at home. I did my best, but it never felt like enough. I was working day and night but often felt like I was failing. I spent the summer of 2020 independently exploring new ways to teach in a remote learning environment. It did not feel like a break. Then came the 2020-2021 school year which brought more uncertainty: masks, social distancing, cohorts, dual teaching. Again, we persevered. I adjusted all my lessons and units to fit into this new normal. I could not keep the same pace in our curriculum, use the same tried and true lessons with collaboration and rigor, or expect the same results, but I made it work as best I could. Again, I worked day and night. By summer of 2021, I was more than exhausted. My health, emotionally and physically, was suffering. And, I felt like I couldn't take any time off because it was a burden to my colleagues who were covering for me because there were no substitutes to be found (and this problem has only gotten worse in subsequent school years). Our last school year moved us into new territory yet again. In my district I was still expected to dual teach both online and in person when

students are quarantined. This required constant flexibility and sometimes throwing out plans for the week and starting over. I've had to change the scope of most of our typical units and lessons because students need even more scaffolding and an opportunity to relearn skills from the previous two school years. I don't see this changing any time soon. I don't like to think of kids being "behind," but we also can't just plow forward as if nothing is different. Like me, many students' mental health is also fragile. The ripples of the pandemic continue to reverberate across our schools, without enough time to process all we've been through. And, approaching the last months of this school year, I don't think I've ever felt so ready for summer. I know my story is not unique. I hope you pass this bill to show educators that they are valued and motivate us to move forward and stay teaching. We need to continue to educate Connecticut students with the passion they deserve. The burnout is real. I fear for our schools and our students if we don't take real steps to recognize this. I hope you will pass this bill to reward, support, and recognize teachers like me who've been through so much and are feeling like more keeps piling on. Respectfully submitted, Jennifer Sacks

Thank you for your time and consideration.

